

# Anarchism

George Woodcock

To many young people the name 'anarchist' has a romantic ring: to many older people it signifies beards and bombs.

In this history of libertarian ideas and movements George Woodcock shows us the true face of anarchism as a political philosophy. He presents it as a system of social thought which aims at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly at the replacement of authoritarian states by co-operation between free individuals. As such anarchism has a respectable pedigree. Proudhon, with characteristic defiance, adopted the label with pride. But before him there had been William Godwin (and his disciple, Shelley) and the German egotist, Max Stirner; and after him there followed the Russian aristocratic thinkers—Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the great Tolstoy by whom Gandhi was so much influenced.

It is the ideas of these six men which are minutely examined in this study, along with the anarchist movements which sprang from them.

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NICOLAS WALTER



GEORGE WOODCOCK IS A CANADIAN SCHOLAR of 50 who was active in the English anarchist movement, during and after the last war. His field is English literature, but he has also written many articles, pamphlets and books on many aspects of anarchist thought and history. He is the author of some of the English anarchist manifestoes published by the Freedom Press, and of the standard biographies of Godwin, Proudhon and Kropotkin. He is in fact one of the best-informed Anglo-American authorities on the literary and biographical aspects of anarchism.

His new book\* is a fat paperback which sets out to describe the whole anarchist movement from a sympathetic but by no means sycophantic point of view. It begins with a Prologue to pose the problem, and ends with an Epilogue to sum the problem up. In between it contains a history of anarchism from the publication of Godwin's *Political Justice* in 1793 to the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. This history is divided into two main parts, on the *Idea* of anarchism and on the anarchist *Movement*.

The opening problem is simple enough. "What is anarchism? And what is it not?" Anarchy, anarchist and anarchism are difficult words with double meanings familiar to us all. Is *anarchy* just chaos, or is it something more? If something more, then what? Is an *anarchist* a person who is unruly, or unruléd, or both? Unfortunately, the word "anarchist" (like "Christian" or "Quaker" or "Tory" or "Whig") began as a term of abuse, thrown at the Levellers after the English Revolution and at the *Enragés* after the French Revolution. It was accepted by Proudhon in the 1840's and by Bakunin in the 1870's, and by many of their followers in the Labour Movement. But it has often been accepted by people outside the Labour Movement. Is

\***ANARCHISM: a History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements**, by George Woodcock. (To be published on June 30th by Penguin Books at 7s. 6d.).

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*anarchism* a movement, or an attitude, or what? Today it is generally used as a term of abuse again.

Woodcock stresses the unpredictable and protean nature of anarchism. He compares it to "water percolating through porous ground—here forming for a time a strong underground current, there gathering into a swirling pool, trickling through crevices, disappearing from sight, and then re-emerging where the cracks in the social structure may offer it a course to run." He lists the main streams of anarchist thought (individualism, mutualism, collectivism, and communism) and the best known tributaries (nihilism, anarcho-syndicalism, and anarcho-pacifism), and he points out that the constant disagreements between anarchists have usually concerned revolutionary methods or economic organisation.

Woodcock mentions the "family tree" of anarchism, but he has little time for it. "What has so often been represented as the prehistory of anarchism is rather a mythology created to give authority to a movement and its theories, in much the same way as a primitive clan or tribe creates its totemic myths to give authority to tradition or taboo." This is perhaps the truth, but it is surely not the whole truth. For example, Woodcock dismisses the extreme Christian sects of the Middle Ages and the Reformation in a few sentences, but George Huntston Williams' new history of *The Radical Reformation* shows how genuinely and significantly anarchist many of them were. Kropotkin's idea of two currents—libertarian or anarchist, and authoritarian or statist—running through human thought and behaviour is possibly an over-simplification, but it has more relevance than Woodcock suggests. But even if Woodcock is wrong to give so little credit to anarchist prehistory, he is right to spend so little time on it—it would easily fill a book by itself.

He finds the "earliest recognisably anarchist movement" in the English "Diggers" of 1649, and shows that their leader Gerrard Winstanley was indeed nothing more nor less than an anarchist. But Winstanley and the Diggers disappeared in 1650, and were forgotten until Eduard Bernstein, the German socialist, rediscovered them in 1895. Woodcock jumps forward to the French *Enragés* of 1793, and shows that their leader Jacques Roux was also nothing more nor less than an anarchist. But Roux and the *Enragés* also disappeared, though they were not forgotten. In the end, Woodcock begins with William Godwin, the English radical writer. He takes Godwin as the first of six big names who get a chapter each. (They are the same as the big names in Paul Eltzbacher's *Anarchism*, minus Benjamin Tucker). What is interesting about these six is that three of them had nothing to do with the "formal" or "official" anarchist movement, three of them rejected the use of violence, and three of them were Russian aristocrats. Altogether they're an odd lot.

WILLIAM GODWIN the Rationalist, the follower of Paine and teacher of Shelley, the Calvinist minister turned journalist whose *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Political Justice* (1793) was the first systematic exposition of anarchist theory. MAX STIRNER the Egoist, the follower

of Hegel and forerunner of Nietzsche, the unsuccessful and pseudonymous girls' teacher whose *Ego on His Own* (1845) was a passionate argument for amoral individualism rather than moral altruism for private rebellion rather than public revolution. PIERRE-JOSEPH PROUDHON the Mutualist, the follower of the French Revolutionaries and founder of the French anarchist movement, the self-taught printer turned journalist whose *What is Property?* (1840) was the first anarchist text to acknowledge the anarchist name. MICHAEL BAKUNIN the Collectivist, the follower of Proudhon and forerunner of Kropotkin, the anarchist noble who fought on barricades, suffered prison and exile, quarrelled with Marx, and was the leader of the anarchist movement in Europe from 1867 to 1876. PETER KROPOTKIN the Communist, the follower of Bakunin and inspirer of thousands, the anarchist prince who wrote scientific books, suffered prison and exile, quarrelled with Lenin, and was the leader of the anarchist movement in Europe from 1878 to 1914. LEO TOLSTOY the Pacifist, the follower of Christ and teacher of Gandhi, the anarchist count who wrote magnificent novels, suffered conversion and excommunication, and was the founder of the anarcho-pacifist movement.

Woodcock describes the life and thought of each of the six in some detail, and does it very well. But it seems rather odd to concentrate on so few important anarchists when there have been so many. Anarchists are after all notoriously disloyal to their leaders. Nevertheless, the idea of anarchism comes over convincingly enough.

Woodcock gives another six chapters to the anarchist movement. There is a general account of "international endeavours", detailed accounts of anarchism in France, Italy, Spain and Russia, and rapid surveys of anarchism in North and South America and in northern Europe, including Britain.

The "largely unsuccessful search for an effective international organisation" is a depressing story. First the followers of Proudhon tried to work with other socialists; then the followers of Bakunin quarrelled with the followers of Marx, were driven out of the First International, and tried to form an international of their own; then the anarchists tried once more to work with other socialists; then they were driven out of the Second International as well, and again tried to form an international of their own; and then in 1923 the anarcho-syndicalists formed an international which took the name of the First International the International Working Mens' Association, which is still based on Stockholm and is represented in Britain by the Syndicalist Workers' Federation.

But there is still no vigorous anarchist international organisation and no prospect of seeing one. The best hope is for informal rather than formal co-operation between the various "national" movements. Every country's anarchist movement seems to have seen better days. There have been great men, and great events.

Among the great men (and women) outside the big six are the Réclus brothers, Sebastien Faure, Louise Michel, Voltairine de Cleyre (who is not mentioned), Fernand Pelloutier, Emile Armand, Errico

Malatesta, Camillo Berneri, Pi y Margall, Domela Nieuwenhuis, Johann Most, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Josiah Warren, Albert Parsons, Benjamin Tucker, and dozens more. "And some there be, which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been . . . But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten . . . Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth for evermore." And there are always the odd ones, such as Anselme Bellegarrigue, the French individualist who appeared briefly between 1848 and 1850 and seems to have followed La Boétie and Thoreau and to have foreshadowed Nieuwenhuis and Tolstoy; and Gustav Landauer, the German Jewish "anarcho-socialist" who began in the Social Democrats, wrote *The Revolution*, and was killed in the fall of the Bavarian Soviet of 1919; and the beyond-the-fringe anarchoids of the English-speaking countries—Shelley, Emerson, Thoreau, Morris, Wilde, Read, and so on.

Among the great events are the peasant movements of Andalusia, Mexico and the Ukraine, and the Robin Hood leaders—Buenaventura Durruti, Emiliano Zapata and Nestor Makhno; the martyrdom of the Chicago anarchists in 1887 and of Sacco and Vanzetti forty years later; the burst of terrorism in the 1890's, which was represented by "Ravachol" and has never been forgotten by the enemies of anarchism; the growth of anarcho-syndicalism in the 1890's, which—as Woodcock makes quite clear—was *not* represented by Georges Sorel: the growth of anarcho-pacifism after the first World War, which was represented by Bart de Ligt, the author of *La Paix Créatrice* and *The Conquest of Violence*; the anarchist influence on artistic and literary movements around 1900, when many Impressionist painters and Symbolist poets were involved in the movement; and the heroic efforts by thousands of unknown men and women at many times in many places.

Woodcock describes the movement of each country well enough, but in rather romantic terms. He tends to concentrate on the vivid episodes at the expense of the deeper undercurrents, so that he sees the failure of anarchist movements as symptoms of anarchist failings rather than as results of social changes. But whenever you feel that part of the story is not done well, you are surprised, as Dr. Johnson would put it, to find it done at all. This is, you must remember, the only available full-length history of anarchism in English, and it is probably better than it would have been if anyone else had written it.

The Epilogue is a depressing thing to read. What remains of anarchism? "Only the ghost of the historical movement, a ghost that inspires neither fear among governments nor hope among peoples nor even interest among newspapermen." What is the verdict? "Clearly, as a movement, anarchism has failed." Woodcock considers that anarchism failed once and for all when General Yaguë marched into Barcelona on 26 January, 1939, without any resistance at all. He believes that anarchists have constantly deceived themselves about the nature of their movement, which was "really a movement of rebellion rather than a movement of revolution," an anachronistic and amateurish protest against the way the Industrial Revolution and State Socialism

were going rather than a genuine challenge to either of them.

"Lost causes may be the best causes," he admits, "but once lost they are never won again." But "ideas do not age," and the anarchist idea spread far beyond the anarchist movement itself. Populist, agrarian and syndicalist movements everywhere; *satyagrahis* in India, *kihbutzniks* in Israel and *sindicalistas* in Sicily; Vinoba Bhave, Martin Luther King and Danilo Dolci; shop-stewards, marchers and sitters in this country—all these owe more to anarchist ideas than they know. Apart from this diffusion of anarchist ideas, Woodcock favours the constant reiteration of the anarchist "counter-ideal" of perfect freedom against the authoritarian ideas of perfect order—an attitude already favoured by some anarchists under the name of "permanent protest". But in the end Woodcock comes down to an ultimate reliance on the independent minds of individual men. This is the moral of his book.

This is no more acceptable than the dismissal of anarchist pre-history. Anarchy is more than utopia, and anarchism is more than a cry of pain. Anarchists begin as individual men, but they become something more. Permanent protest is not enough. Words without deeds are wind. If anarchists want to have a future as well as a past, they must look forwards as well as backwards. Woodcock ends his story in 1939, but things have happened since then. The trial of the editors of *FREEDOM* for disaffection in 1945 is directly relevant to the trial of the six members of the Committee of 100 in 1962. Anarchists have in fact taken part in all sorts of resistance to the state since the war, both in this country and abroad. The campaigns for nuclear disarmament, racial integration and workers' control do not belong to the territory of classical anarchism, but there is no doubt that we belong to them. Ironically enough, the arrival of Woodcock's book in this country coincides with a revival of interest in anarchism in this country. *Peace News* and *Solidarity* are always being accused of anarchism. Twice as many people went to the Anarchists' Ball in January 1963, as went to the previous one in October 1961. The Committee of 100 is alleged to be an anarchist front, and many anarchists joined it in dominating the Aldermaston march this year. If the Spies for Peace aren't actually anarchists, they are certainly full of anarchic ideas.

Stuart Hall once said that "the anarchist case . . . is weak largely because it has not been put" (*New Left Review* 6), and Alan Lovell once said that "the formal anarchist movement in this country is totally useless and an absolute disaster for any kind of serious anarchist thinking" (*NLR* 8). No one could say anything like that today. But many people, both friendly and unfriendly to anarchism, are still ignorant of anarchist history. They need be ignorant no longer. Woodcock has not written the best possible history of anarchism, but he has certainly written the best available one. It will be interesting to see how many copies of it are sold in this country, and even more interesting to see how its readers react to it. Despite his parting message, George Woodcock may have helped to turn a fashion into a movement again. For *FREEDOM* is more than a voice crying in the wilderness, and freedom is more than a crazy dream.



## 2 The Anarchist Past

GEORGE MOLNAR



THE LITERATURE ABOUT ANARCHISM IN ENGLISH IS VERY POOR. George Woodcock's *Anarchism* is the first general history to have been published in sixty years. For this reason alone it is a welcome phenomenon. In it the reader will find a detailed history of anarchist thought and action, written in a simple, popular style, and conceived in great sympathy with its subject matter.

*Anarchism* is in two parts, with a prologue and an epilogue. Part I examines 'The Idea', and Part II 'The Movement'. In the first chapter of Part I Woodcock discusses some of the claims that have been made on behalf of a variety of precursors and antecedents of anarchism. He argues convincingly that most of these claims are unjustified. Only Winstanley and the Diggers, and the Enrages (Roux and Varlet) survive scrutiny and are admitted as genuine predecessors of modern anarchism. (Similar caution is not exercised in assessing the successors of anarchism: Woodcock sees nothing wrong with including Gandhi, *via* Tolstoy, in the anarchist tradition).

Separate chapters are devoted to Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy. This is an odd line-up: you wouldn't think that all these deserve to be ranked as anarchist thinkers of equal importance. It is hard to see what, for example, Stirner and Tolstoy have in common with each other or with Bakunin, and still harder to see what Godwin, Stirner or Tolstoy have to do with the anarchist movements discussed in Part II. This heterogeneous selection is influenced, it seems, by Woodcock's view that "anarchism is both various and mutable." Beneath the variety, however, the historian discerns uniformity in the common assumptions of anarchist theories. These assumptions, mainly belief in the natural sociability of man, opposition to the idea of progress, individualism, and a "deeply moral-

GEORGE MOLNAR wrote on *Conflicting Strains in Anarchist Thought* in *ANARCHY* 4. His discussion of Woodcock's *Anarchism* first appeared in the *Bulletin of the Libertarian Society of Sydney University*.

istic element", unite the plurality of anarchists into a distinct and recognisable whole.

Woodcock's discussion of the anarchist idea is largely uncritical. There is, for instance, a fundamental ambiguity in the notion of 'sociability'. The theory that society is natural but the political State is artificial may assert one of two things. (1) That social processes cannot be created or maintained by coercion alone; that in addition to any coercion, co-operation is a feature of any social relation. (2) That co-operation can exist to the exclusion of coercion; that the conflicts and disharmonies which give rise to authoritarianism are less real, less necessary than the real, spontaneous harmony of ungoverned society.

Proposition (1) is undoubtedly true, but by no means warrants the various optimistic conclusions which anarchists have drawn from the theory of sociability. On the face of it, it looks as though *both* co-operation (voluntary action) and coercion are universal categories of social life. Both are features of any social situation. If that is so, we have no reason for hoping that man's innate sociability will help anarchists to establish the kind of free society which is perfectly harmonious, in which authority is replaced by co-ordination, and repression by consultation. Only if proposition (2) were true could this be expected. Woodcock does not seem to have noticed that anarchists regularly fail to prove (2). The evidence they give for the existence of 'sociability' never goes beyond establishing (1), although the conclusions they draw from the notion depend on (2). Godwin's theory of human perfectability and his belief in the power of reason, Proudhon's tactic of the "proliferation of mutualist societies", Kropotkin's "adapted social Darwinism", Tolstoy's non-violence and simple living, Stirner's union of egoists, are all, in relation to 'sociability', in the realm of wishful thinking. The possibility of a new form of society and a totally harmonious way of life as envisaged in these various methods simply does not follow from any of the evidence that is adduced to prove man's natural sociability. There is an unfilled gap between the social theories of these anarchists and their policies: if we examine what is tenable in their description of the workings of human society and set this beside their plans and visions for a desirable future condition of that society, we find that the plans are unworkable. In this sense all these anarchists are utopian, and this despite that fact which Woodcock stresses, that anarchists are reluctant to draft Utopias.

Of the six theorists discussed in Part I of *Anarchism* only one escapes this criticism. Bakunin is in some ways the least coherent and least theoretically minded of these anarchists. Yet he is alone among Woodcock's sextumvirate to have shown an awareness of this gap and to have proposed steps for bridging it. It is true that Bakunin believed in the elemental, spontaneous upheaval of the people, and this side of his thinking receives adequate stress from Woodcock. But Bakunin also saw that mighty popular outbursts do not necessarily lead to anarchy, he saw the need for organization, for 'revolutionary

science', for leadership. This part of his thinking is dismissed by Woodcock as merely a mania for conspiracy, but surely it was more than this. Bakunin made an independent and original contribution to anarchism by facing up to the need for leadership, and the value of this contribution is not diminished by the fact that Bakunin himself was reluctant to publicize it, nor by the fact that it was not an anarchist but Lenin who eventually put the Bakunist scheme into practice. The value of Bakunin's organizational insights lies in this: they show that no revolution, no fundamental change in the structure of society, can be accomplished without in the process either perpetuating old forms of authoritarianism or bringing into being new forms. Bakunin is alone among anarchists in not being a utopian but this he achieves only at the cost of demonstrating the impossibility of bringing about a global state of freedom.

The anarchist paradox is one of means and ends. The ends are always glorious on paper, but they remain unattainable either because the means are vacuous, or, as in the case of Bakunin, where the means are realistic they corrupt and subvert the ends, and lead to an outcome other than anarchy. This is confirmed by Part II of *Anarchism*. All historical libertarian movements have turned out to be impotent to affect any of the changes they strove for. To the extent to which they retained their anarchist purity they remained small, isolated and far too feeble to influence the course of history. On the other hand in places where they achieved some sort of size and power—in Spain, France, or the Ukraine—the organizations with which they were associated were "libertarian in name only". As far as the insurgent anarchists of Catalonia or Southern Russia are concerned, Woodcock puts this failure down to the exigencies of war. War is essentially unlibertarian. But what of anarcho-syndicalism? Woodcock momentarily recognises that syndicalism, with its aim of an apocalyptic general strike, is also the "continuation of politics by other means". But he immediately brushes this aside as a "question of definition" (p. 32) and returns to insist on "the real difference between anarchist direct actionism and the methods of other left-wing movements." The difference is supposed to be that anarchist tactics

"are based on direct individual decisions. The individual takes part voluntarily in the general strike; of his own free will he becomes a member of a community, or refuses military service, or takes part in an insurrection. No coercion or delegation of responsibility occurs; the individual comes and goes, acts or declines to act, as he sees fit. It is true that the anarchist image of the revolution does indeed take most frequently the form of a spontaneous rising of the people; but the people are not seen as a mass in the Marxist sense—they are seen as a collection of sovereign individuals, each of whom must make his own decisions to act." (pp. 32-3).

When, however, we turn to the actual description of the French C.G.T. we find reproduced a slight paraphrase of the words in which Michels exposed the latent élitism of the syndicates:

"Nor did the C.G.T. as a whole represent a majority among the workers of France; the anarcho-syndicalist theoreticians rather welcomed this fact, since they felt that a relatively small organization of dedicated militants could activate the indifferent masses in a critical situation, and in the meantime would not lose their potency by immersion in a mass of inactive card-carriers. The Bakunist conception of a revolutionary élite played a considerable part in anarcho-syndicalist theory." (p. 322).

Add to this the fact that every time the historian records an anarchist "success" it is in terms of gaining control of some organization or institution, and the picture emerges of anarchists losing both ways. When they retain their principles they get nowhere or are quickly beaten; when they achieve anything it is at the cost of the purity of their beliefs.

The persistent miscarriage of anarchist plans has deep-rooted causes which Woodcock does little to illuminate. Despite his obvious sympathy with anarchists he has not escaped the conventional historian's attachment to the values of success. History, as it is all too often written, is the story of the victorious, the successful, those that come out on top. The history of anarchism cannot of course be that. But it can be, and in this case unfortunately is, written with an eye to appraising ideas and movements in terms of success. Thus Woodcock in his epilogue is obliged to write off historical anarchism as a lost cause, and to proclaim as viable only the libertarian ideal whose future lies in "the impact of its truth on receptive minds". What can we make of this return to rational propaganda and individualism? If this is all there is to anarchism we have little reason to think that a good cause has been lost.

Anarchism has certain features in common with socialism, populism, etc. It is distinguished from them by being the only radical movement whose principal avowed concern was with freedom. The error of traditional anarchism is that its exponents imagined that they could eliminate power and authority once and for all, and could establish the exclusive reign of liberty on earth. The positive achievement of anarchists was that they struggled and protested against authorities of all kinds as they encountered them. But to struggle against authority at all is to struggle in defeat. That is why it is inappropriate to regard anarchists as mere historical failures. Of course they failed in realising their illusory schemes—what else could be expected? Yet in the course of working towards these imaginary ends they did succeed, concretely and tangibly, in criticising, harassing and opposing the power-holders of Right, Left and Centre. Their very activity—protest in the name of freedom—is bound never to be successful in the conventional sense. "Why give freedom to sheep? They only bleat," said Stirner (Woodcock doesn't quote this). Freedom is not something to which the world can be converted: it is of its nature a minority interest. That anarchists, with whatever illusions, persisted in taking this unpopular stand is a mark of steadfastness, a sign that there is something



recurrent and permanent about their cause. Seen in this light the famous words of Vanzetti (quoted by Woodcock) acquire a new meaning.

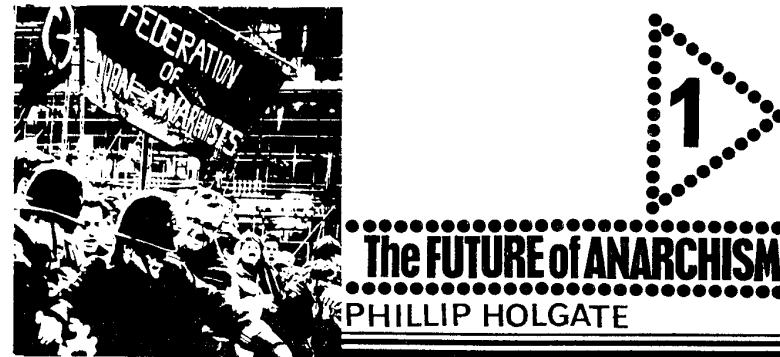
“If it had not been for this, I might have live out my life, talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we do such a work for tolerance, for justice, for man’s understanding of man, as we do now by an accident. Our words—our lives—our pains—nothing! The taking of our lives—lives of good shoemaker and a poor fish-peddler—all! The last moment belongs to us—that agony is our triumph!”

The triumph of anarchism is its agony, its success is failure. Holy fools rush around with a jumble of philanthropic ideas in their heads and a deeply moralistic element in their souls. They sacrifice their talk, their sweat, their ingenuity and often their blood for what to all the world appears nothing. They succeed in only one thing: protest of the kind that is always defeated. That is their career, that is the substance of anarchism.

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A CONFLICT BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY ON ONE HAND and the traditional mechanisms of government on the other was always foreseen by the earliest believers in the theory of the free society, who tend, like Godwin or Kropotkin, to talk in terms of nineteenth-century revolutionary action. The likelihood of such a conflict remains, unless social sciences are themselves captured by the mechanisms of power and rendered subservient to them. It is plain that such a revolution cannot usefully be envisaged in the military terms which appealed to some, at least, of the earlier revolutionaries; it is more likely to follow upon the collapse or the threatened destruction of the existing patterns under the weight of their own contradiction.

—ALEX COMFORT: *Sex in Society*



ANARCHISTS HAVE THEIR FINGER IN EVERY PIE. The distinguishing feature of anarchism is that it brings political, social and individual revolution together and asserts that each of them is dependent on the others.

One of the consequences of this, taken together with the nature of anarchist ideas, is that we are at a crossroads among minority groups. In one direction the ILP, the SPGB, the dissident Marxists and libertarian socialists all feel some kind of friendship towards anarchism, particularly aspects such as support for direct action, workers’ control, and hopes for a free socialist society. Despite some assertions of purism this friendship is reciprocated. On the other hand groups which are chiefly interested in individual salvation, such as the pseudo-psychology cults also find it possible to exchange mutual sympathy with the anarchists. In yet a third direction, every reformist organisation whose objects or methods can be stretched to include a leavening of libertarianism finds some support among anarchists who feel concerned in that particular direction. Hence anarchists have been closely associated with the Aldermaston and Direct Action movements, the Boycott, and the anti-Capital Punishment campaign. The list can be extended. Occasional voices assert that truth can only be found when the anarchists get together with the Flying Saucer people, and so on.

Anarchists therefore, tend to develop a kind of minority consciousness. That is, a feeling which is common to people who belong to minority groups of very varied kinds, and is independent of the particular features of their own minority.

This brings several problems in its train. One of them is the way in which peculiar individuals find a home on the fringe of the movement, and discourage casual inquirers. There are certain people who cause groans to go up simply by coming into a meeting because whatever their hobby horse, they will get a chance to bring it in discussion, divert the course of the meeting and considerably reduce its value in attracting non anarchists. Whereas the authoritarian parties would expel or disassociate people who misrepresent their views to outsiders, the tolerant

anarchists welcome them as just another group of valiant non-conformists.

On the group and movement level this spirit of generous acceptance also makes itself felt. As mentioned above, anarchism has a practical kinship with an extremely varied selection of movements. Simply form a group which is generally progressive, and a tiny minority, and you will find some anarchists supporting it, writing about it in our papers, writing about anarchism in its papers, and so on. As a result, anarchism is often treated, not on the merits of its case, but as one of an indistinguishable array of minority cults.

Another problem, which is more important, is the effect on anarchist ideas themselves of this minority position. A leading article in *FREEDOM* a few years ago began: "Writers in this newspaper are not at all elated that our speculations on world politics are usually accurate. It strikes us as a social tragedy that a handful of anarchists are alone able to grasp the significance of competitive political power when the facts are available to all." Now if we are right, and our ideas are fairly simple to grasp, then the mass of people who have consistently ignored them for a century must be particularly foolish, neurotic or vicious. Unfortunately, it is these people to whom we have to get our ideas across if they are going to have very much effect.

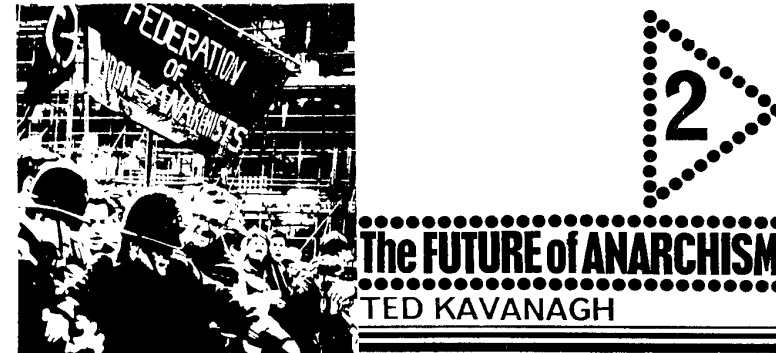
It is suggested by more conforming people that rebels just enjoy opposing the majority attitude for the sake of being different. Whether this is ascribed to moral defects or complicated psychological drives depends on the sophistication of the attacker. However, this sort of feeling only becomes dangerous when it is inwardly accepted by the person to whom the criticism is directed. Once a group assents to the idea that it is doomed to be an ineffective and diminishing minority, that the big world is too corrupt even to recognise the people who can put it right, and that rebellious attitudes often spring from psychological needs quite different from the ones to which they are ascribed, then it will indeed become ineffective and its activities sterile.

Objectivity demands that we concede some truth to the above criticisms, but what is really important is that it should be demonstrable that they are not true as a whole. That is, anarchists must find ways of expressing themselves which do not consist of crying in the wilderness, or playing ring-a-ring o'roses with all the other minority sects. It is no use making propaganda at all unless we feel confident that it will have a good effect.

To achieve this, anarchists should consistently try to find answers to the problems that ordinary people are facing. The outlook that leads to debates on "Which should the Working Class support: the Revolutionary Marxist Unity Party or the United Socialist Workers' Front?" has nothing to do with reality. The ideas we put forward must however, be anarchist ones and not watered-down versions for popular consumption. The false dichotomy between the conceptions of "escapist" revolutionaries and practical-minded "revisionists" needs breaking down, and the best way is by showing in practice that anarchists can provide a realistic way of facing up to practical problems.

Finally, to what extent does anarchism still involve the idea that

it can only be effective when everyone has accepted it? Are we looking for world-wide unanimity or are we content to make a contribution to finding a way through social problems knowing that the solution reached will be either a synthetic one or a pure compromise and hoping that the anarchist influence will be as big as possible?



WHEN DEFINING ANARCHISM dictionaries, like many anarchists, tend to be ambiguous. Most dictionaries define *anarchy* as chaos, utter lawlessness, disorder, or a harmonious conditions of society in which law is abolished as unnecessary. And an *anarchist* is: one whose ideal society is without government of any kind and who seeks to advance such a condition by means of terrorism. Another interesting statement is in the *Handbook of Social Psychology*, which says that "Anarchism, though it shows some of the actionistic fantasy of the previous century, is based not so much on a utopian future as on a return to a primitive naturalism which shall free man from the political state and economic exploitation. In this sense, anarchism has much in common with the mythology of the return to an arcadian past. Its theory of a perfect world is not a building of the future but a retreat to a golden age." I quote this at length, not because it has in fact anything to do with anarchism, but because it states the position of those precious wishful thinkers who haunt such movements as anarchism. Their vision of the future seems to be groups of ballet dancers cavorting on verdant lawns with the Mantovani strings in the background, and groups of fair children singing the verses of Patience Strong.

Utopia, that sublime inanity and retreat from history, is the bane of the serious anarchist's existence. Utopia is a prophesy, a statement about the ultimate condition of the human race and the human environment. It is a rejection of the present, and a static view of our species.

But anarchism is a philosophy of action, a way of getting things done. Anarchists however, tend to describe the "free society" in terms

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of what it will *not* be like, and anarchism in terms of what it is not, or in relation to other systems. The result is that anarchists appear to be people with a well-developed critique of politics and history, good intentions and a belief in the doctrine of original virtue.

The free or free-er society can only be a valid goal if we can see the seeds of it in the world we live in and know. Our revolution would be a rejection of the values which cause us to misuse our technology, an insistence on the right and need for human beings to determine the conditions of their own lives. What is important is not what the means of production are, but how the real producers and consumers stand in relation to them. The revolution in Russia failed because, although it led to the industrialisation of the country, it merely brought about a change in leadership and introduced industrial relations which are essentially the same as those practiced in the capitalist West. In the socialist republics socialism is a myth. In their own terms they have failed. The free communist society cannot be created by simply eliminating anybody who fails to shout the slogans without enough, or with too much, conviction.

Mutual aid and workers' control have long histories. The trade unions and the workers' organisations which preceded them grew out of the desire of working men to have control over the conditions of their own lives, and this could only be achieved on the basis of solidarity with one's fellows. Indeed the principles of mutual aid and workers' control exist in industry here and now. If people were as stupid as their employers think they are, modern industry—which is dependent on the intelligence and inventiveness of the people on the job—would be impossible. I have never met a man who *wanted* to do bad work. It is the capitalist methods of "rationalising" production and not modern technology as such, which withhold from producers the satisfactions, and from consumers the benefits, of productivity.

But are the anarchists ready, capable, or even willing, to work towards the "free society"? I believe a few of them are. But a far larger number seem to want the "perfect society". Perhaps this explains the extraordinary amount of time spent discussing the irrelevant or the imponderable, as though the revolution were for gods rather than men. Propaganda has always been an important aspect in the programme of anarchists. In the latter part of the 19th century in France, the printing trade was notorious for its radicalism. And anarchists were not so fastidious about sedition and direct action. The recent publication of the R.S.G.6. pamphlet demonstrates that, thanks to modern technology which has supplied us with such things as duplicators, small printing presses, silk screens, etc., it is possible to reach a remarkably large public, provided that one organises distribution well enough. (The R.S.G.6. pamphlet, for example, has, at the time of writing, gone into a least fifteen independently produced editions).

If we are to help build a free or free-er society, we have to work with people as we know them, in the schools, factories, workshops and offices. If our dream is to become a reality, they must also desire it. To the unemployed or the hungry, Utopia is a joke in bad taste. The future is now!



## The FUTURE of ANARCHISM

COLIN WARD

A GOAL THAT IS INFINITELY REMOTE is not a goal at all, said Herzen, but a deception. And it would be a useful exercise in mental self-discipline if we anarchists, instead of aiming at infinity, were to set out what we think we can accomplish by, say, 1970. (I am making the assumption that we do want to effect *some* kind of social change—and if you don't think so, don't read on). If you attempt this discipline you will see what modest hopes we can honestly expect to entertain for the next few years. We have to tell the world that the anarchist idea exists and what it means: this more than anything else is the value of George Woodcock's book which will be in a thousand shops up and down the country in a few weeks' time. We have to tell the world that people exist today who propagate the ideas of anarchism: this more than anything else was the value of the notoriety accruing from the demonstration in London on Easter Monday. We have to tell the world that journals exist which seek to apply the ideas of anarchism to the contemporary world. Personally, I want the monthly sales of this journal to reach 4,000 by 1970—and if this seems to you a pathetically humble aim, just try and realise it.

That I can advance the mere act of saying "Look: we exist!" as the basis of a programme for a decade, illustrates the confusion in the anarchist vocabulary between "is" and "ought", between what is likely to happen and what ought to happen. One consequence of this confusion is that, with our eyes fixed on one big ultimate solution, we neglect the thousand minor, temporary, transient solutions which might actually be attained. The great anarchist virtue of many supporters of the Committee of 100 is that simultaneously with their "sublime folly" in making a frontal, if symbolic, attack on the State at the point where the State is least likely to yield at all, they are intent on other direct action projects in fields where their impact might even be felt—the housing shortage, racial tensions, the Factory for Peace, the care of the old and the liberation of the young. This combination of intransigence and creative effort, of permanent protest and the use of anarchism

as a *method* of approach to present problems, is, it seems to me, sufficient programme for our generation.

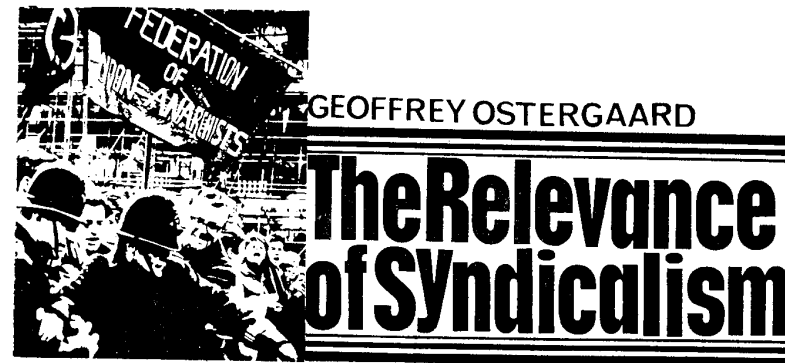
Kropotkin remarked that man will be compelled to find new forms of organisation for those social functions which the State now fulfils through the bureaucracy and that "as long as this is not done nothing will be done". To discover, to describe, to develop and to propagate these new forms of organisation is, I think, the most important task for anarchists in the immediate future, especially when, as at the moment, there is a certain wave of interest in anarchist ideas around us, an interest which we should not lose our chance of exploiting.

It is also the particular function of ANARCHY to serve as a journal of anarchist *applications* and techniques: the techniques of "encroaching control" in industry, of "de-institutionalization" in the organisation of social welfare, of applying in the ordinary primary and secondary schools the lessons of the progressive schools, of encouraging and widening the field of the habit of direct action. If we can manage to implant anarchist aims and methods in the fabric of our daily common life, we won't have to worry about the future of anarchism.

IF THE WORD 'ANARCHISM', as a name for the attempt to effect changes away from the centralized and institutional towards the social and 'life-oriented' society, carries irrational implications, or suggests a pre-conceived ideology either of man or of society, we may hesitate to accept it. No branch of science can afford to ally itself with revolutionary fantasy, with emotionally determined ideas of human conduct, or with psychopathic attitudes. On the other hand suggested alternatives —'biotechnic civilization' (Mumford), 'para-primitive society' (G. R. Taylor)—have little advantage beyond their novelty, and acknowledge none of the debts which we owe to pioneers. 'Free society' is equally undesirable for its importation of an emotive and undefinable idea of freedom.

If, therefore, the intervention of sociology in modern affairs tends to propagate a form of anarchism, it is an anarchism based on observational research, which has little in common with the older revolutionary theory besides its objectives. It rests upon standards of scientific assessment to which the propagandist and actionist elements in nineteenth-century revolutionary thought are highly inimical. It is also experimental and tentative rather than dogmatic and Messianic. As a theory of revolution it recognises the revolutionary process as one to which no further limit can be imposed—revolution of this kind is not a single act of redress or vengeance followed by a golden age, but a continual human activity whose objectives recede as it progresses.

—ALEX COMFORT: *Authority & Delinquency in the Modern State*



TO DISPLAY ANYTHING OTHER THAN AN ACADEMIC INTEREST in syndicalism at the present time is to lay oneself open to the charge of being a social troglodyte. Syndicalism, as a movement of any size and influence, flourished in the first two decades of this century and, since then, apart from a brief and cruel flowering in Spain during the Civil War, it has been a spent force. Avowedly syndicalist groups and organisations still exist in many countries but their memberships are numbered in the hundreds and thousands rather than in the tens of thousands and millions; and a dispassionate observer would be forced to place them firmly in that half-submerged political world inhabited by "the socialist sects". Periodically, attempts are made to regroup the scattered forces of syndicalism in preparation for a new offensive: there have been several such attempts in this country since the war of which the National Rank-and-File Movement launched two years ago is only the latest. But it seems unlikely that such attempts will lead to any significant movement in the foreseeable future.

Why, then, should we bother our heads with syndicalism? Why not leave the subject to the historians? It is clearly one of the failures of history, a movement that didn't "come off". With our eyes on the present and the future, why concern ourselves with the past, especially the unsuccessful past? As T. S. Eliot has reminded us, "We cannot revive old factions or follow an antique drum"; and perhaps we ought not, even if we could.

There are at least two good reasons for not adopting the viewpoint implicit in such questions. One obvious reason is that the present and possible future cannot be understood without an understanding of the past. And by "the past" I mean not only the "successful" past—that part of history which most obviously leads to the present; I include also the "unsuccessful" past—that part of history which, from the

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viewpoint of the present, seems to have led nowhere. It is a point often overlooked, even by intelligent historians, that there is as much, if not more, to be learned from the failures as from the successes of history. This, as I shall try to show, is particularly true of syndicalism. An understanding of why syndicalism failed and a pondering on the implications of that failure can illumine our understanding of the present in a way that no account of "successful" movements could do.

A second good reason for not dismissing syndicalism out of hand is perhaps more debatable, since it stems from the values inherent in my own political position. Looked at in the round, the world socialist movement since 1917 has been divided into two great camps: the social democratic camp, on the one side, and the Bolshevik or Communist camp, on the other. These two camps have been and remain sharply divided over the question of the road to the socialist society. The social democrats have opted for the constitutional and democratic road, while the Bolsheviks have been prepared, if necessary, to take the revolutionary road. But despite this and other differences, both social democrats and Bolsheviks are united in believing that the road to socialism lies through the acquisition by their respective parties of the political power of the State, the institution claiming, within its territory, sovereignty and a monopoly of the instruments of coercion. In this respect, both social democrats and Bolsheviks differ from the socialists of what might be called the third camp: the camp of the anti-state or non-state libertarian socialists. Not much has been heard of this camp in the last forty years. Historically, it has comprised a variety of groups and movements both constitutional and revolutionary. These include the so-called pre-Marxist "utopians"; the co-operators; the anarchists in all their different hues; the guild socialists; and, of course, the syndicalists. Apart from the doubtful exception of the co-operators, the list looks like a list of "failures". But it is my conviction that, between them, the adherents of this camp have provided both the most realistic analysis of capitalist society and also the most penetrating insights into the essential conditions for the realisation and maintenance of a free, egalitarian, classless and international society.<sup>1</sup>

At the present time we are witnessing the decomposition of social democracy. The social democratic road, it is now becoming clear, leads not to socialism as traditionally understood, but to the managerial-bureaucratic Welfare-cum-Warfare State. In one important area after another, Bolshevism is gaining ground at the expense of social democracy. Bolshevism, at least, has demonstrated in a way that social democracy has never done, its capacity to make a revolution, to establish a new social order. What, alas, Bolshevism has not demonstrated and shows no sign of demonstrating is its capacity to create a new social order remotely resembling that of the classical socialist ideal. If the future does indeed lie with Bolshevism, so much the worse for the socialist dream!

From this perspective, the libertarian socialist tradition takes on a special significance for the present generation of socialists. It may be—and we have cause enough to be sceptical—that there is *no* road to

the truly socialist society. The whole ideology of socialism over the last 150 years may come to be seen in the future—if mankind has any future—as yet one more ideology preparing the ground for the rise of yet one more historic ruling class<sup>2</sup>. But, *if* there be a road, I am convinced that it is the third road which the syndicalist helped to pioneer. I believe that the socialists of this generation will have to take a long step backwards if they are ever to move forwards again in the right direction. They will have to reassess the whole libertarian tradition from Owen to Sorel and from this re-assessment draw sustenance for a new third camp movement.

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The most striking feature of syndicalist thought and action is the importance it attached to the class struggle. The classical syndicalist movement emerged at about the same time as the first great revisionist controversy at the turn of the century. Led by Bernstein, the revisionists questioned, among other things, Marx's analysis of class development and his theory of the state. They argued, in effect, for what I have called the social democratic position—the view that socialism could be achieved gradually by a broad democratic movement acquiring, peacefully and constitutionally, control of the existing machinery of the State. This amounted to a right-wing revision of Marxism. Syndicalism, in contrast, was a revision of Marxism to the left. The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was seen by the syndicalists as the very essence of Marxism—"the alpha and omega of socialism", as Sorel put it. All their energies were devoted to the relentless pursuit of this struggle: the class war was to be fought to a victorious finish with no compromise given or taken. Any form of class collaboration was regarded as an anathema. Like the Marxists, the syndicalists saw the State as a bourgeois instrument of coercion. Where they parted company from the orthodox, however, was in their opposition to any form of the State. Marx argued that the task of the proletariat was to destroy, in the course of the revolution, the bourgeois state and to put in its place a proletarian state, which would be the prelude to the eventual liquidation of the coercive apparatus of society. The syndicalists, influenced in this respect by the anarchists, insisted that the State *as such* must be destroyed by the revolution: to build a new state on the ruins of the old would simply result in the perpetuation of class rule over the proletariat in a new form.

This view implied a rejection not only of parliamentary action—the contesting of elections for bourgeois parliaments—but also of political action in the narrow sense of the term. The syndicalists insisted that the class war must be waged, as they put it, on the *terrain de classe* by direct action. Fighting the class war involves, of course, political action in the wider sense of a struggle for social power. What distinguished the syndicalists was the view that this struggle for social power, the struggle to achieve proletarian ascendancy, did not involve setting up a specialised political organisation, to wit, a political party. On the contrary, quite the reverse. To try to achieve socialism through such an organisation would be fatal to the very aims of the proletariat.

It is important to grasp this point and the reasoning behind it if we are to make any sense of syndicalism. To Bolsheviks, rejection of party organisation will appear to be the fatal error of the syndicalists. The so-called Marxist revolutions of our century have been carried through only by use of the instrument of a highly disciplined proletarian party perfected by Lenin. No Communist party, they would argue, means no revolution, or at least no successful revolution. How, it might be asked, could the syndicalists have made such a stupid mistake?

This, of course, is a begging question. But, leaving aside the suggestion that the syndicalists were in error, it is relatively easy to see how they arrived at their position. In a sense, they did so because they were more Marxist than Marx himself and certainly less heretical than that arch political determinist, Lenin. For those who accept the materialist conception of history, political power is essentially a derivative of economic power. A class that possesses economic power will necessarily, sooner rather than later, acquire political power. If, then, one sets about acquiring the latter and is able to do so, one need not worry overmuch about the former. For the proletariat, as for the bourgeoisie, economic power means power within and over industry. If the workers can win control of industry, the battle for supremacy is won. James Connolly put the syndicalist point succinctly when he wrote, "The workshop is the cockpit of civilisation . . . The fight for the conquest of the political state is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is being fought out every day for the power to control industry."<sup>3</sup>

But there is more to the syndicalist case than this. Taking seriously the theory of the class struggle, the syndicalists worked for a clean-cut, uncompromising proletarian victory. Socialism for them meant the replacement of bourgeois culture and institutions by proletarian culture and institutions. Their whole conception of socialism was a thoroughly working class conception<sup>4</sup>: they had no patience at all for middle class socialists, not even for the guildsmen who were closest to them and who, with their statist ideas, were, as they put it, "incapable of conceiving a commonwealth which is not designed on the canons of bourgeois architecture".<sup>5</sup> When Marx in his Address to the First International had said that the emancipation of the proletariat must be the work of the workers themselves, the syndicalists thought he meant it. They did *not* think that emancipation would come through the organisation of a self-styled proletarian party led principally by men of bourgeois origin who for one reason or another had taken up the cause of the workers. Bourgeois socialist intellectuals—students, professors, publicists and the like—had only a limited auxiliary role to play in the strategy of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> Their task was to make explicit what was implicit in the social situation of capitalist society: it was most definitely *not* their task to instruct the proletariat, to guide them and to lead them into correct courses of action. Any movement which allowed itself to be directed by bourgeois intellectuals, even *déclassé* intellectuals, would, they believed, end up either by compromising with the *status quo* or by establishing a new form of class rule.

This perspective led the syndicalists to juxtapose the concept of class against that of party.<sup>7</sup> As social formations, these two are quite different. A class is a natural product of historical development, comprising individuals who occupy essentially the same position in the economic order. A party, in contrast, is an artificial aggregate, a consciously contrived organisation, composed of heterogeneous elements drawn from all classes. A class is based on homogeneity of origin and conditions of life, and the bond of unity is economic. A party, however, represents essentially an intellectual unity; the bond uniting its members is ideological. When an individual is approached on the basis of class, the focus is on his role in the economic order, a role which separates him from members of other classes; and the opposition of class interests is high-lighted. When, however, an individual is approached on the basis of party, the focus is on his role as a citizen and elector in the political order, a role he shares with members of all classes; and inevitably the opposition of class interests is muted. Parties may and often do express class interests but, more important, they also serve to moderate and to contain class antagonisms.<sup>8</sup>

The syndicalists, of course, appreciated that classes as such do not act. Social action involves the actions of individuals in organisations. Organisation, therefore, was an admitted necessity: in this they differed from the classical anarchists who minimized the importance of organisation and pinned their hopes on the possibility of spontaneous revolutionary uprisings. But, if the class struggle was the basic reality, why, asked the syndicalists, create an organisation—the party—which would inevitably from its very nature undermine that struggle? Why, indeed, when the proletariat *already* had an organisation of its own: the trade union, an organisation based on the working class, confined to members of the working class, and created by the workers for the purpose of defending their interests in the daily struggle against their capitalist masters. True, the trade unions had been conceived, even by their creators, as mainly ameliorative instruments, as a means to win for the workers concessions within the capitalist social framework. But there was no *a priori* reason why their role should be so limited. Given proper direction, it was argued, they could be transformed into revolutionary instruments.

A single-minded emphasis on the potentialities of the trade union is in fact the most distinctive single feature of syndicalism. The syndicalist saw the trade unions as organisations with a dual role to perform: first, to defend the interests of the workers in existing society, and secondly to constitute themselves the units of administration in the coming socialist society. From a long term point of view, the second role was, of course, the more important. It was a role that did not begin on the morrow of the revolution. The syndicalists did not simply assert that the basic unit of social organisation in a socialist society would be the trade union and draw up blue-prints in which the unions, federated at the local, regional, national and international levels, would take on all the useful functions now performed by various capitalist bodies. The revolutionary role became operative at once. The task



of the unions was to struggle *now* to divest the existing political organisations of capitalist society of all life and to transfer whatever value they might have to the proletarian organisations. This part of the syndicalist programme was summed up in Sorel's words: "to snatch from the State and from the Commune, one by one, all their attributes in order to enrich the proletarian organisms in the process of formation".<sup>9</sup>

It is an egregious error to accuse the syndicalists, as some Bolsheviks have done, of ignoring the problem of power. Not only did they not ignore the problem; they proposed the most realistic way open to the workers of acquiring power. It is true that they were mistaken in their belief that the unions could perform the dual role assigned to them. To be effective as defensive organisations, the unions needed to embrace as many workers as possible and this inevitably led to a dilution of their revolutionary objectives. In practice, the syndicalists were faced with the choice of unions which were *either* reformist and purely defensive *or* revolutionary and largely ineffective.<sup>10</sup> But in the context of modern society, their general strategy of power was surely correct. They proposed to begin to acquire power at the point where, according to the logic of Marxist theory, they ought to begin—in the fields, factories and mines. And they did so because they were convinced that, unless they did win power within the social base of capitalism, there would be no *proletarian* revolution, whatever other kind of revolution there might be. The syndicalists said, in effect, that the revolution must begin in the workshop. Their message to the workers was much the same as Goethe's to the emigrant in search of liberty: "Here or nowhere is your America." Here, in the workshop, in the factory and in the mine, they said, we must accomplish the revolution or it will be accomplished nowhere. So long as we are a subject class industrially, so long will we remain a subject class politically. The real revolution must be made not in Parliament or at the barricades but in the places where we earn our daily bread. The organisations that we have built up to carry on the daily struggle must be the foundations of the new order and we must be its architects. The law and morality that we have evolved in our long struggle with capitalism must be the law and morality of the future workers' commonwealth. All other proposals are but snares and delusions.

The syndicalist strategy of revolution, therefore, involved a struggle for social power through direct action based on the workers' own class organisations. The tactics of direct action included sabotage, ca'canny, the use of the boycott and the trade union label, and, of course, industrial strikes. What is common to all these means is a determined refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of bourgeois rule. It was not, argued the syndicalists, a proper function of trade unions to make agreements with the employers. Negotiations, agreements, contracts all necessarily involve bargaining and compromise within the framework of capitalist contrived rules. The function of the unions was not to participate with employers in ruling the workers but to impose, as far as they were able, the will of the workers on the employers. The only contract

the syndicalists cared to consider was the collective contract conceived as part of a movement of "encroaching control"—a system by which the workers within a factory or shop would undertake a specific amount of work in return for a lump sum, to be allocated by the work-group as it saw fit, on conditions that the employers abdicated their control of the productive process itself.<sup>11</sup> After a period of vigorous pursuit of such tactics, the workers in their unions would, it was envisaged, have won sufficient power to make a successful General Strike possible. Such a strike, since it was only the *form* of the revolution, could not be planned in advance: the conditions had to be ripe for it. It would probably begin as a local or national strike confined to a single industry. Class solidarity would lead to its extension to other industries and rapidly it would build up to a strike general in its dimensions.<sup>12</sup> The mass symbolic "folding of arms" would, in effect, be a total withdrawal of the workers of their consent to a system of class servitude. The legitimacy of the capitalist order would be shattered and in its place would emerge a proletarian social order based on the unions.

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For a movement that is generally labelled a failure, there is surprisingly much in syndicalism that is relevant for our own age. Most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that it did fail. In retrospect, syndicalism appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the first and only socialist movement to take seriously Marx's injunction that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves. It attempted to achieve the emancipation of labour unaided by middle class intellectuals and politicians and aimed to establish a working class socialism and culture, free from all bourgeois taints. That it failed suggests that, whatever else they may be, the socialist revolutions of recent decades are not the proletarian revolutions the ideologists would have us believe. In this connection the eclipse of the syndicalist doctrine of workers' control, in the USSR no less than elsewhere, and the subordination of trade unions to political parties and their quasi-incorporation into the machinery of government, take on a special and ominous significance. We are, indeed, living in a revolutionary epoch in which dramatic changes are taking place in the composition and structure of the ruling class. But in both East and West the emerging rulers, displacing the old capitalist class, are not the workers but the managerial bureaucrats whose privileges and power are based on their command of organisational resources. In the West the rule of this new class is being legitimized in terms of a rationalized corporate capitalism operating in a mixed economy; in Communist countries, the formula of legitimization is avowedly socialist and the economy is state-owned and managed. But, in both, the rulers, like all ruling classes known in history, accord to themselves superior rewards and privileges; and the mass of mankind continue to toil and to spin for inferior rewards and for the privilege of keeping their rulers in a state to which they show every sign of becoming accustomed. The new society, rationalized managerial capitalism or bureaucratic state socialism, is in many respects a more tolerable society than competitive

capitalism. Given industrialisation and modern economic techniques, mass poverty can be and is being abolished. For this reason, in all advanced industrial countries the acute class divisions that marked 19th and early 20th century capitalism are becoming blurred and it is no longer possible to locate in the social arena a simple straightforward contest between two main classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the techniques of social control available to the rulers in the shape of the mass media of communications and the mass political parties have enormously increased their power *vis-à-vis* the ruled. All in all, the emerging managerial-bureaucratic society possesses historically unparalleled potentialities for maintaining a stable system of exploitation. There is only one major flaw in the system: its patent inability to solve the problem of war in an age when, for technological reasons, war has become a truly deadly institution.

The omnipresent threat of nuclear annihilation now clearly vindicates the anti-statism of the anarchists and the syndicalists. For war is a function of the state and of the state system into which mankind is politically divided. The emerging new social order has modified the bourgeois state system: it is no longer a system of many balancing sovereign nation-states but rather a system of two super-states each surrounded by their satellites plus a group of uneasy non-aligned and relatively undeveloped states. The state system has been rationalized but not rationalized enough: for, within the framework of a state system, nothing short of one world state would be adequate to solve the problem of war in a nuclear age. And a world state—set up by mutual agreement—is just not on the political agenda of the great powers. The reasons which led to the capitalist ruling class in their several states to engage in mutually destructive wars still operate to make possible, and perhaps almost inevitable, the final war between states dominated by the managerial-bureaucrats. The great tragedy of our epoch is the lamentable failure of the socialist movement, with its fine promise of universal peace and brotherhood, to appreciate that an indispensable condition for achieving its objective was the liquidation of that supreme bourgeois institution, the sovereign state. Failing to appreciate this, the socialists after one hundred and fifty years of endeavour have succeeded not in making socialism but only in making socialist states. Not surprisingly, in this situation the socialist leaders have found what the anarchists and syndicalists always predicted they would find: that it is impossible for socialists to accept the responsibility of governing in existing states without thereby becoming defenders of them.<sup>13</sup> The role that they occupy as state leaders inevitably impels them to act like state leaders, even to the extent, as in the case of the USSR, of making them subordinate, in the interests of the Soviet State, the revolutionary Communist movements in other countries. That the Soviet leaders have not always and everywhere succeeded in this subordination, with the result that we are now witnessing the development of national rivalries within the international Communist sector of the world, is no consolation. It makes only more obvious

the fact that socialist revolutions within states, even socialist revolutions within all the states of the world, would not solve the problem that now faces mankind. If the USA were to sink into the ocean tomorrow, the state system in the rest of the world would not, for example prevent the possibility of war sooner or later between a Communist China and a Communist Russia. To think otherwise is to put far too high a value on the beneficent effects of a common ideology, to ignore the material interests that divide one state from another, and to overlook the disastrous increase in nationalist sentiment that is a feature of the contemporary world.

It may be that, from the point of view of sheer survival as a species, mankind has already passed the eleventh hour. In the present context of human affairs, Lenin's cryptic phrase, "We are all dead men on furlough", takes on a new significance. In the contemporary crisis, there is only one sensible course open to those who wish to survive the next decade: to join the struggle to control, or better still to overthrow, the nuclear warlords, militarists and political bosses in all states. This struggle in an inchoate form has begun and is already gathering momentum in many countries. And it is no accident that the most determined participants in the anti-war movement have found themselves adopting the classic stance of the syndicalists: direct action. A direct action movement always has been and always will be an anathema to the rulers and would-be rulers of mankind. For direct action involves a refusal to play the political game according to the rules laid down by our masters. It is a grass-roots, do-it-yourself kind of action which recognises implicitly the truth of what Gandhi called 'voluntary servitude'; the fact that, in the last analysis, men are governed in the way they are because they content to be so governed. When sufficient numbers of the governed can be persuaded to withdraw that consent and to demonstrate by their actions that they do not recognise the legitimacy of the rulers to act in their name, the government must either collapse or radically change its policies. When the bishops and the editorial pundits warn the participants in the recent Civil Disobedience campaigns that they are undermining the foundations of social order, we should take heed. Civil Disobedience, pressed to its logical conclusion, involves just that. All we need to add is that it undermines the *present* social order which has brought mankind to the edge of the abyss and prepares the way for a new social order in which power will be retained by the people.

There is thus a clear link between the syndicalist movement of forty years ago and the present movement against nuclear weapons. The link is there both in the political style and in several of the basic values of the two movements. The differences, of course, are obvious too. Syndicalism was a proletarian class movement: the anti-war movement appeals to the sane-minded in all classes. In terms of revolutionary potential, the present movement is perhaps of greater significance. The immediate issues involved are simpler and more dramatic than those raised by the syndicalists and the crisis is more compelling. If mankind survives the present crisis, some of the other issues raised

by the syndicalists, notably workers' control as a means of ensuring a wide dispersion of social power, will again come to the fore—are indeed already doing so<sup>14</sup>. It is, therefore, I think, no extravagance to claim that the spirit of syndicalism, dormant so long in this country, is once again in the air. In this, of anything, lies a hope for the future. The serious anti-war radical would do well to breathe in full measure the syndicalist spirit of militant direct action.

#### NOTES.

- <sup>1</sup> Towards the end of his life, G. D. H. Cole placed himself squarely in this third camp. "I am neither a Communist nor a Social Democrat because I regard both as creeds of centralisation and bureaucracy, whereas I feel sure that a Socialist society that is to be true to its equalitarian principles of human brotherhood must rest on the widest possible diffusion of power and responsibility, so as to enlist the active participation of as many as possible of its citizens in the tasks of democratic self-government"—*A History of Socialist Thought*, Vol. V, p.337.
- <sup>2</sup> The idea that socialism may be no more than the ideology of the future ruling class is not a new one. It was first elaborated by the Polish revolutionary, Wacław Machajski, in his book *The Intellectual Worker*, published in Poland in 1898. Hints of the same thesis may be found earlier in some of Bakunin's writings. For a discussion of Machajski's ideas, see Max Nomad's *Apostles of Revolution* and, more especially, *Aspects of Revolt*.
- <sup>3</sup> *Socialism Made Easy*, 1908.
- <sup>4</sup> See the editorial, "Syndicalism—a Working Class Conception of Socialism" *Freedom*, Nov.-Dec. 1912.
- <sup>5</sup> Socialist Labour Party, *The Development of Socialism* (c.1912).
- <sup>6</sup> That intellectuals have only an auxiliary role to play in the socialist movement is a major theme in Sorel's writings.
- <sup>7</sup> cf. A. Gray, *The Socialist Tradition*, 1947, p.414.
- <sup>8</sup> The wealth of empirical data on the social class basis of most major parties should not blind us to this important truth. It is not an either-or matter: either parties express class interests or they do not. **Within** a political system, parties frequently express class interests (though not necessarily according to the Marxist category of classes); from the point of view of **the system as a whole** however, for the reasons adumbrated by the syndicalists, parties tend to mitigate class conflicts and hence to preserve the socio-political system. Communist parties implicitly recognize this fact in the special measures they adopt in an attempt to preserve their revolutionary character, e.g., subordination of the parliamentarians to the party caucus. These measures, needless to say, are not always successful.
- <sup>9</sup> *L'Avenir socialiste des Syndicats*, 1898.
- <sup>10</sup> For a discussion of this crux, see Gaston Gerard, "Anarchism and Trade Unionism", *The University Libertarian*, April, 1957.
- <sup>11</sup> W. Gallacher & J. Paton, *Towards Industrial Democracy*, 1917.
- <sup>12</sup> The syndicalist vision of the revolution is well described in E. Pataud & E. Pouget, *Syndicalism & the Co-operative Commonwealth*, 1913.
- <sup>13</sup> The popular radical notion that socialism is continually being "betrayed" by leaders more interested in their own than in working class emancipation is sociologically naive. There is no reason to believe that socialist leaders, **as individuals**, are any more corruptible than most other men. What is corrupting is their acceptance of certain roles which, if they are to be performed at all, impel them to act in ways that radicals define as "betrayal". It is as difficult for a socialist statesman not to betray socialism as it is for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven—and for the same kind of sociological reason.
- <sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *The Bomb, Direct Action & the State* (1962) published by the Syndicalist Workers' Federation.



Alan Lovell

## Theatre Workshop's War Requiem

GO AND SEE *Oh What a Lovely War* IMMEDIATELY. First of all because it is a wonderful evening in the theatre. It has everything; high drama and broad humour, colour, dance, music, attractive girls and a feast of songs, witty, nostalgic, dirty, catchy, ironic. It has one of the funniest moments I have sat through in the theatre when a sergeant drills a squad of raw recruits for minutes on end without saying an intelligible word to them; and it has one of the most moving as a group of soldiers softly sing:

*If you want the old battalion,  
We know where they are, we know where they are, we know where they are.  
If you want the old battalion,  
We know where they are. Hanging on the old barbed wire.  
We've seen 'em. We've seen 'em.  
Hanging on the old barbed wire.*

*Oh What a Lovely War* uses the basic shape of a Pierrot show to create an experience of the First World War. Dressed in a permanent, clown-like uniform, the cast use only odd props like a general's hat, a walking stick, a black shawl for their purposes. This shape gives the show an exhilarating freedom. The Pierrot show evokes the period with its suggestion of the music hall, concert entertainers and sea-side shows. It allows song, dance and straight drama to be mixed together without any clash. The action can range widely: from France to England, from the front line trenches to a London Music Hall. The actors have similar scope; one moment a private soldier, the next a general, one moment Earl Haig's wife, the next a factory worker.

The Pierrot show also provides a critical framework for the commentary on the war the show provides. Unlike most plays you see in the theatre, you are not asked to believe you are witnessing 'real'

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life. When an actor changes hats and by doing so stops being a member of the Astro-Hungarian secret police and becomes a British general instead, you can hardly believe that. You are always aware of the ritual the theatre is. The ritual of *Oh What a Lovely War* parallels the ritual of the war it describes. Soldiers use their uniform in rather the same way an actor uses costume—to become somebody better able to cope with a new situation. Earl Haig as the commander-in-chief of the British forces was acting out an idealised and unreal conception of himself. The nature of the show makes you see war in a new light.

Some of the reviews have suggested that *Oh What a Lovely War* is no more than a Pierrot show—a mixture of song, dance and story thrown roughly together and given shape by Joan Littlewood's genius. Nothing could be further from the truth. The sequences of the drama spring naturally and directly out of the overall conception. One of the triumphs of the show is that it gives the appearance of a completely free form when it has clearly been carefully worked on.

Three sequences illustrate this care. The first re-tells the story of the meeting of British and German soldiers in No-man's-land at Xmas, 1914. It begins as an almost sentimental interlude with the British soldiers' joking being interrupted by a German soldier singing Holy Night. The British soldiers (after first mistaking the source of the singing as 'those bloody Welshmen in the next trench') respond not with a carol but with a very funny obscene song which the Germans mistake for an English carol. The barriers broken down by this bizarre musical exchange, the meeting in No-man's-land takes place. It is an unsentimental and convincing recreation of the incident.

Near the end of the evening there is a church service. It is done absolutely straight. The actor who plays the priest catches the weary earnestness of the clergyman on the big occasion. The hymns are very familiar ones, including 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'What a Friend we have in Jesus'. We immediately recognise and respond to the familiar church service. But our response is contradicted by what is happening inside the familiar ritual. The priest is telling men who will very likely die the next day that the Archbishop of Canterbury has said it is not a sin to help the war effort on Sundays. The words of the hymns are rather different from usual. The first line of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' is 'Forward Joe Soap's army'. The opening verse of 'What a Friend we have in Jesus' is:

*When this lousy war is over  
No more soldiering for me  
I will put my civvy clothes on.  
Oh, how happy I shall be.*

Sung in a very pleasant tenor voice, the hymn sums up the powerful, ironic effect of the whole sequence. You expect the religious pieties and there is the simple human demand. The soldier may have a friend in Jesus but he'd rather take a chance on the war ending.

In the third sequence, three women dressed in black shawls stand talking. They discuss the work they are doing for the war effort.

One remarks on the high wages women can earn in a munitions factory. Another who works in a cotton factory says 'We're doing some funny work at the moment. They say it's for shrouds. I'd rather work on ammunition. Done is an almost throwaway manner with the actresses grouped in a dim light at the side, upstage, the underemphasis has a haunting, poetic effect.

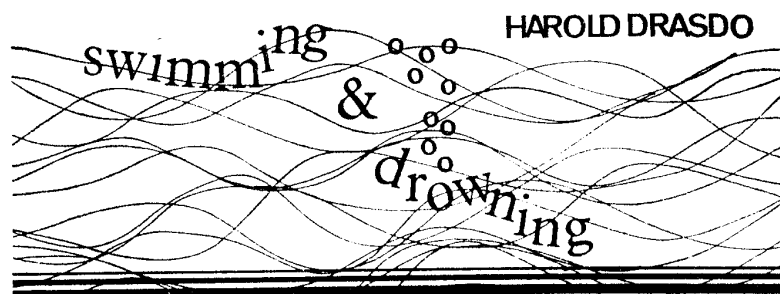
*Oh What a Lovely War* is not simply propaganda. It has been accused of caricaturing the officers, of explaining the war in crude class terms. Its attitudes are more complex than this. One scene illustrates the point perfectly. A wounded private, just arriving back in London, sees an officer he recognises and calls to him. The officer turns and says something like 'Hello Higgins. Good to meet you. See you back in the trenches.' As the scene is played it doesn't simply demonstrate the insensitivity of the officer. The private gives the greeting to the officer a slightly winning tone. He is clearly making an emotional demand on the officer. As played by Murray Melvin the officer is a boyish figure, aware of the man's demand but too young to cope with it and so defending himself with a conventional and absurd response to the greeting.

Earl Haig is the dominating figure in the last part of the drama. Though we are made to realise his narrow, obstinate stupidity and insensitivity, he also comes across as a man with his own integrity partly because we hear his actual words, written during the war.

By the end of the evening, the first world war has stopped being a date in a history book. In watching the show you have imaginatively lived through the war. You have been made to face its monumental absurdity—the authentic photographs from the war that are projected onto the screen and the facts flashed in an electric ticker tape at the back of the stage keep reminding you that the war *happened*. You realise that the men were not the simple heroes of war memorials and armistice day services. They were sceptical about the war, distrustful of their commanders. But they weren't incipient pacifists. A final scene with the French army making a charge baa-ing like lambs frighteningly suggests the way the men continued to respond to the often insane demands of their commanders.

*Oh What a Lovely War* does not have an original author. Charles Chilton (a BBC producer who has similar things on the radio with songs of the American Civil War) is credited with the idea on which the show is based. In the programme it is described as a Theatre Workshop Group Production. It clearly is. Everybody involved in the show makes an important contribution. The cast is magnificent. Victor Spinetti with his direct humorous control over the show as the Pierrot master; Fanny Carby catching the pleading sincerity of a pacifist agitator; Colin Kemball singing 'When this lousy war is over'; Brian Murphy impersonating a British general trying to contain his senility by a stiff bearing; Ann Beach's cheeky vitality and enthusiasm throughout the show. These caught my eye but other people's list will be different.

Apart from having the original idea, the collection of songs Charles Chilton has made for the show is one of the foundations of its success. Raymond Fletcher, the military adviser, gives it a factual historical framework that stiffens and hardens it. Joan Littlewood's contribution is so important it is impossible to detail. One example must do. A nurse sings 'Keep the Homefires Burning'. The song is deadeningly familiar. The physical movement on the stage and its placing bring the song very much alive. The drama builds to a climax. Haig dominates the proceedings, driving the men on and on. The figures of the dead flash on the ticker tape. There comes a mad scene as the stage is filled with men clearing the trenches of bodies and mud and singing "The bells of hell". Haig appears at a balcony crazily singing the song as if he were at a mess party. Then the stage darkens, the men disappear and the lone figure of a nurse (Myvanwy Jen) moves slowly, swanlike across it singing 'Keep the Homefires Burning'. In this context a dead song comes to have the force of a Wilfred Owen poem.



**THE EARLY DROWNED** and other poems: Hilary Corke. (Secker and Warburg, 1961).

AMONGST THE BOOKS OF VERSE WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN BRITAIN during the sixties Hilary Corke's first collection stands most conspicuously away from group and style. The publisher's note tells us that Mr. Corke went from Charterhouse to Oxford, spent the last four years of the war in the field artillery, and lectured later at Cairo and Edinburgh: the pressures there to settle any man but Mr. Corke's poetry, at any rate, hasn't been impressed. It is notable for its diversity and non-conformity; a rather appealing nature shows through it.

He separates himself instantly from the majority of modern poets

by an uncompromising introductory note and by the fact that he isn't afraid of the effect of a little light verse on his persona. In *Mr. Samuel Bunce* he teases officialdom—

Our rules and regulations,  
Our poly-purpose plan,  
Are wrecked by gross evasions  
On the part of natural man.

He *will* not use BLOCK CAPITAL;  
Signs *off* the dotted line;

.....  
And ladies *will* not wrap it all  
In the swimsuits we design.

In *Sailing to India* and in *The Rage of the Water against Hastings* we meet another humour, bizarre and fascinating, not easy to compare with anything in vogue.

A good deal of his work is love poetry in two or three characteristic veins. Anyone with a taste for the pre-Elizabethan lyric will be haunted by *At Chelsea*, which in mood and imagery and in awareness of loneliness and identity makes something new from that tradition. In general he writes about sexuality and love without reticence or self-consciousness; he has the romantic's abandon but a delicacy that comes with sincerity helps him to avoid extravagance. One or two of his poems are about the sort of despair commonly associated with adolescent love: a theme poets seem to evade nowadays, because of its flatness and finality perhaps, but as proper as any other—if it resists analysis it still deserves description.

Mr. Corke enters these pages, however, not purely for the general interest and distinction of his poetry but rather for an undercurrent becoming apparent in his more recent work. It shows most clearly in asides, less obviously in areas of interest. "The tree of state may live on hate for sap," he reflects in one poem; "Last night we spoke of the Bomb, of the perilous statesmen," he admits in another. He asks, in *Pompeii*, where a man can run to—"now the whole world is one volcano grown". In *Roslyn Chapel* he looks at an old carving of Lust and would have a more bitter word for the Church if weren't unnecessary now: "This tigress' claws are drawn". Perhaps today, he persuades himself in one piece of wish-fulfilment, a politician will admit self and party entirely mistaken on some issue: "I dream of that awhile, then sick at heart/Go down to find the newspaper on the mat." He watches *The Procession* go by (it bears no reference to "any specific government or occasion" he points out in his notes) and his laconic comment is—"Myself would be more willing to clap, if."

Mr. Corke might be outraged to see his work searched for anarchist attitudes and one takes risks in writing about him for he rebukes unsatisfactory reviewers—he was a gunner, I've mentioned, and if I remember rightly he shot down David Holbrook and Al Alvarez. This

does not deter us. It is perfectly clear that he has that libertarian temper (a disenchantment with institutions; a disaffection towards the power-state; a liking for the informality of the natural world; and admiration for that uniqueness, that *freedom*, that sometimes shows like energy in a man or woman) which agrees to almost all but the name of political anarchism—which often enough wrestles for these attitudes in privacy or torment but may be piqued or even refuse to listen when told that they are recognised, are not uncommon, are subsumed in this one distasteful word.

I make this point because the one complaint I have about Mr. Corke relates to it. In his lonely position, looking at the forces massed against him, he's found a dusty answer: courage, he thinks, and endurance are all we have left; you can't win but you can be brave. He applauds his ancestor "who saw the joke beneath the mammoth's foot". Well, that sort of courage is an interesting and a rather affecting human characteristic. But, really, it isn't only useless: it's irrelevant. Are we to offer the fags around with a wisecrack when 1,000 roentgens is registered? Surely, when men can find a space for courage and principle in living we need not require them to die with dignity. In fact, life in Britain today can pose several tests to consciences crippled sometimes by an obstinate sensitivity or an ingrained decorum. Mr. Corke has a very striking lyrical gift and he is obviously a man of integrity; he knows well that the oppressed are "our proper concern"; but a background sense of community and purpose might strengthen his work, might give it force and direction. After all, the acknowledgment of a position sustained and fortified so fine a poet as Brecht—who would have preferred to write on other themes had he lived in a happier time ("Ah, what an age it is/When to speak of trees is almost a crime/For it is a kind of silence about injustice!").

In conclusion, one of Mr. Corke's poems is worth particular mention. *Children Playing* is an extremely beautiful and sympathetic observation on the child and society. It doesn't tell the whole truth about children, naturally—it has to be read against *Lord of the Flies*. But in its scepticism about received educational values and in its orientation towards spontaneity and joy it expresses perfectly an anarchist position. "You are in the right of it, children, in the right./They buy you and they tie you to their wheel:" he declares. And, subversively, he advises: "Play seriously and frivolously work".

Learn how the earth moves, not in books but blood,  
And how the leaf is so, the flower is signed;  
Forgetful of the debaucheries of talk,  
Forgetful of the sarcasms of the gown  
And all that blackboard rubbish, copied down,  
Of sine and cosine, adjectival clause,  
The salts of iron, the attributes of God,  
And Caesar and his stupid stupid wars.

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## Sex in Society

**ALEX COMFORT**

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Dr. Comfort boldly calls sexual intercourse 'the healthiest and most important human sport'. Nevertheless a dispassionate study of it is impossible to conduct in Britain or America today. The scientist has to contend with the absence of unbiased data and controlled statistics, with a large measure of social disapproval, and with all the risks of an emotionally loaded subject in which even 'the facts' are highly contentious.

Dr. Comfort has all the same done his best to produce, for the benefit of social workers, a documented analysis of the effects of modern sex education and morality on all contemporary behaviour, private and public. The much shorter version of the book which first appeared in 1950 was described by the *Journal of Education* as 'one of which it is difficult to speak too highly. It not only contains an immense amount of information, but is also written clearly and definitely, and with no trace of dogmatism.'

For this enlarged edition, Dr. Comfort has revised the whole book and added much new matter summarising the latest views on pornography, on contraceptives, on teenage delinquency, sex in religion, etc. The level-headed and optimistic presentation of his arguments helps powerfully to dispel the guilt feelings which still sometimes impede the open discussion of sexual topics.

172 pp  
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## Next month's ANARCHY

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